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United for Quality Care

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Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Leslie Haber and I am an Elected Organizer with 1199. My work allows me the privilege of working with health care staff who take joy in providing care, improving the physical and mental health of people incarcerated in the Department of Corrections. I'm an organizer, and what I love about my job is speaking with workers about challenges at work, listening to their ideas to resolve issues, then having them mobilize to press for- and in many cases- win change.

A big challenge at the Department of Corrections is the severe short staffing stands in the way of allowing our members to provide health care at community standards. Incarcerated people are required and entitled to receive this level of care, and yet they don't because of short staffing. For years, we have raised this concern. Our members have participated in rallies in cold rain, and testified before the legislature late into the early morning. Today we are here again to ask that you allocate the funding needed to provide the level of care that.

This summer, rather than talk about the things which should be done to deal with the recruitment and retention issues at the agency, they listed solutions and presented it to Commissioner Quiros and his staff at a Labor Management meeting. The bullet points in the presentation included:

- Provide Continuous Posting- rather than waiting for people to leave to begin the process
- Hire Qualified Agency/Per Diem Staff that would like to come on fulltime and receive benefits
- Forward applicants to best facility
- Do just one interview- not facility by facility
- Nurse supervisors be involved in this process
- HR Streamline the on boarding process -including background checks and physicals
- New Hires start within a month
- Establish a subcommittee of our delegates and management to meet every two weeks to discuss, plan, move and debrief work.
- Set a goal of hiring 40 people a month for the DOC

The agency agreed to work with us on this. Some things worked:

- Having a regular list of interested LPNs, and using it to hold centralized hiring events has allowed the agency to bring dozens of applicants to schedule interviews with hiring panels on the same day. Many took the job.
- Most of the agency staff and per diems who were interested are now in permanent positions at the DOC.
- The interview process was streamlined. People come to a central location, rather than having to go to each facility. They are offered open positions at locations that are nearest them.
- HR streamlined the process for background checks. The number of clinic locations was expanded, the schedule for receiving physicals is tighter,
- ESOS- a program which we have in our contract with DOC allows workers to avoid being mandated by selecting their overtime schedule.
- Our APRN members recently succeeded in pressing for a reclassification to Psychiatric APRNs. This group can prescribe medications. With the resources to hire Psych APRNs across the state, we could resolve the serious prescriber shortage the agency faces.

Despite all this success, we haven't come close to solving the staffing crisis.

- RNs are needed on each shift, in each facility. They are not applying anywhere near the numbers needed. Those who came for interviews mostly decided not to work for DOC or for the state.
- The raises we negotiated simply do not compete with private sector RN pay.
- Another challenge is that the current pay structure does not encourage LPNs who go to school and become RNs to stay with the state. One of members, an LPN for 14 years, has seen less than \$2 per hour increase as an RN.
- Our mental health staff spends too much time handling emergencies. Many of the individuals who are incarcerated need mental health services. To do this, we need the staffing and structure to make trauma informed care and other therapies available to all who need it.

We need your help! We must have the resources to provide those incarcerated in Connecticut with the healthcare they are constitutionally required to receive.

We need you to allocate \$20 million to the DOC Healthcare line item to address systemic understaffing of inmate medical services, to expand access and mental healthcare services to the incarcerated. Thank you for your time.